scrimmage play

THE CENTRAL VIRGINIA SPORTS AUTHORITY

VOL 8. ISSUE 9 : FEBRUARY 22, 2017

15 GOOCHLAND'S TWOMBLY SETS AN EXAMPLE

The Long Game

Like all wrestlers, Western's Anthony Ramazani puts in a full days work on Saturdays.

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STAFF
Bart Isley, Creative Director
Bob Isley, Infrastructure Director
Ryan Yemen, Creative Editor

ON THE COVER
Western Albemarle's Anthony Ramazani

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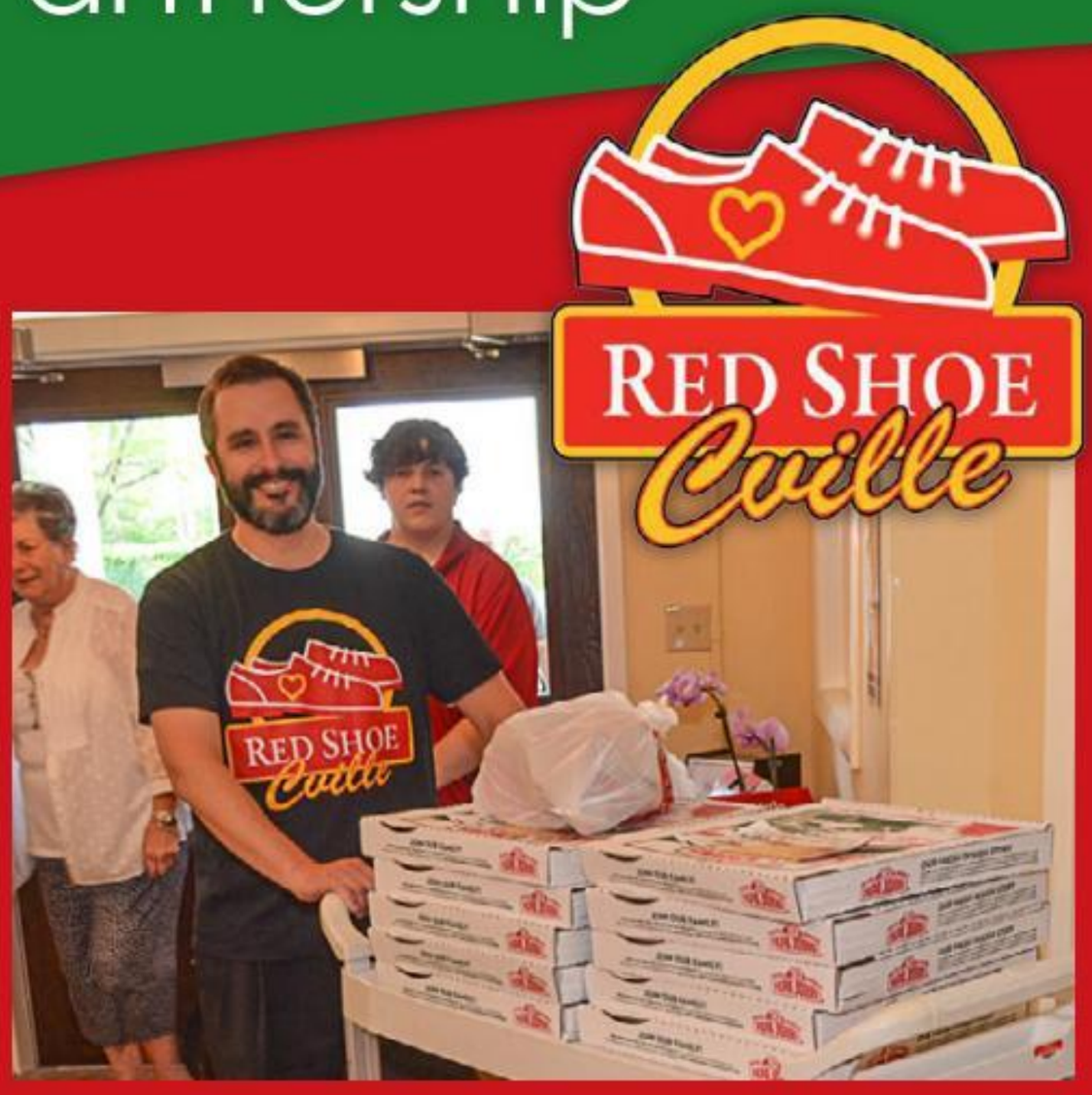

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Cutting the net

William Monroe's Jalen Anderson scores on a layup in the Conference 28 semifinals against Riverside. With a C28 championship win over James Monroe, the Dragons got back in the Region 3A East playoffs for the second time in three years and for the first time under Brett Maynard after he took over in 2015. To read about the Dragons' coference title, flip over to page 19. ✖ *(Photo by Brian Mellott)*

ALTER EGOS

MARK MCGILL

FIREFIGHER

For Western Albemarle and CATEC student Mark McGill, whether he's working as a volunteer firefighter in Crozet or as a team roper and steer wrestler in rodeos, teamwork matters.

"It's a brotherhood, kind of like the firehouse," McGill said. "Everybody knows everybody, everybody is trying to help you and everybody is really encouraging."

CATEC has given McGill the opportunity to pursue his career goals while still in high school as part of CATEC's firefighting program. He fell in love with firefighting after getting involved with the Crozet Volunteer Fire Department at 13 years old. After just a couple of weeks he knew that was definitely what he wanted to do.

"My brother was an EMT, so I always knew I wanted to be a firefighter as a career and this is the first step toward getting all your qualifications to get hired," McGill said. "It's amazing because after high school with college and everything it's going to be hard to get those things done."

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Building from scratch

Regents basketball takes off with familiar local leader

By Bart Isley

Regents School is trying to do something very few schools these days do -- build a basketball program from the ground up. That's not an easy task by any means, and Regents has taken a gradual approach to that growth.

Progressing to varsity competition last year, they've ramped things up this season with a split between varsity games and junior varsity games. Early in February they took on Covenant's squad and fell 68-23.

"We're really a hybrid team, we have guys who should only be playing varsity games and we have guys who should only be playing junior varsity but we're so close that we've got to make this step," said Regents head coach Travis Johnson. "Against the junior varsity teams we're playing well and against the varsity teams we are kind of treading water a little bit."

They're a couple of years into the process now and they're going to be taking a big leap forward next year as the Lions joined the Virginia Association of Christian Athletics (VACA), a league that includes schools like Greene County's United Christian Academy and Grace Christian out of Staunton.

"We'll be starting that next year and these guys have to learn to play these games (like the one against Covenant)," Johnson said. "We're really looking forward to that. The physicality of the game is just so much different at the varsity level."

Covenant athletic director and boys basketball coach Clark Walker, for one, knows what Johnson is capable of and has gotten to see the program develop. Johnson was the head coach for the Eagles before coming to Regents to take over the athletic director role.

"Coach Johnson and I go way back, I was an assistant when he was the head coach at Covenant and we've always had a great relationship," Walker said. "He's building his group of guys and they're super young. Travis is such a classy guy, he does the right things for the right reasons, I have no doubt that he's got the long view in mind."

That young group includes players like eighth grader Landon Swingler and players who'll return next year like Douglas Webb who scored eight points against the Eagles (and posted a 16-point, 17-rebound double double against UCA) and Griffen Cottrell who chipped in six points. With only one senior on the team in Isaiah Nelson (just the second senior basketball player in the program's short history), the Lions could be headed for some particularly big program firsts going forward as they become a full-fledged varsity program.

Of course, building a program doesn't come without challenges as Regents has to acquire gym space for practices and home games without a gym on campus. That can complicate practice schedules on a near-weekly basis. But the Lions continue to overcome those obstacles and improve each year. This season they've picked up wins over Blue Ridge Christian, Tandem and Afton Christian.

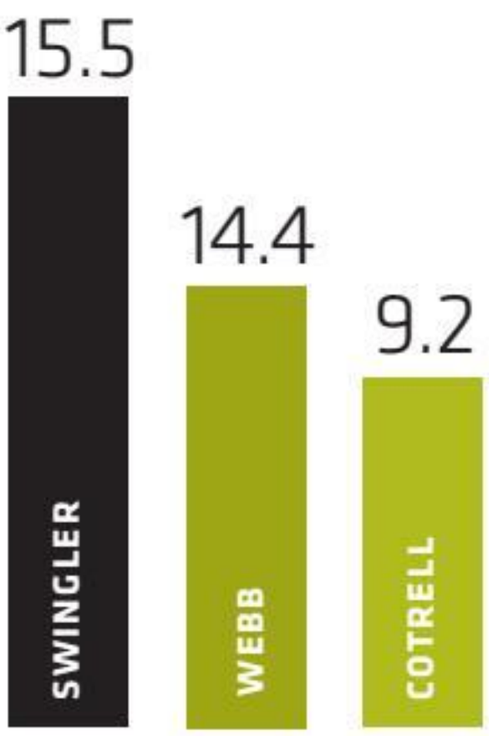
The basketball program is just part of a school-wide athletic expansion that includes cross country, wrestling, track, tennis and volleyball programs for high school aged students as well as a fencing team. It's a natural part of the school's continued growth since being founded in 2010. With a strong leader in Johnson who can set the tone and some talented pieces starting to emerge, Regents is continuing that building process with a solid foundation.

"We still have a long ways to go, I know that, but we've just got to continue to play hard," Johnson said.

Regents junior Douglass Webb is second on his team in scoring. (Bart isley)

{ SPREADING IT OUT }

Regent's leading scorers



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College Update

Albemarle's all-time leading scorer getting rolling at Liberty

By Bart Isley

K.K. Barbour was never any one thing for Albemarle's girls basketball team. She was never just a post player. She was never just a rebounder. She was never just a scorer.

Barbour found a way to be everything all at once and in her sophomore year at Liberty University she's using that jack-of-all-trades skill set again to make an impact at the collegiate level.

Barbour was an All-State pick in Group 5A as a junior and senior. She was Co-Scrimmage Play player of the year as a junior and held the award on her own as a senior after averaging 23.8 points and 10.3 rebounds per game.

At Liberty, she's emerged as a versatile threat again for the Flames who are 9-15 on the year but have staked out an 8-5 conference record and now sit in a tie for fourth in the Big South and just two games out of first. Barbour leads the team in 3-point shooting percentage and is second in overall field goal percentage, checking it at nearly 40 percent from beyond the 3-point line. She's also second on the team in blocks with 17 on the year and third in steals

She's averaging six points and 4.9 rebounds per game in just 16.4 minutes of action per contest. She had six points and five rebounds in just 17 minutes in a 49-48 win over Radford in early February, who is currently at the top of the Big South standings.

That's a big leap over her freshman season where she made appearances in 25 games and averaged 2.6 points and 2.4 rebounds per game, but missed a crucial month of the season from December 5th to January 9th. She posted a career high 10 rebounds in just 11 minutes of work against Longwood in late February that year and also had seven points and six rebounds in the Flames' Big South tournament win over Charleston Southern.

K.K. is making a mark at Liberty now. But anyone who saw her play and appreciated her game while she was at Albemarle can see something pretty familiar in how she's doing it. She's a little bit of everything for the Flames just like she was for the Patriots, and that might make a big difference as Liberty looks to make a push down the stretch this year.

BELOW » Albemarle graduate K.K. Barbour is establishing herself at Liberty as a sophomore. (Liberty Sports Information)

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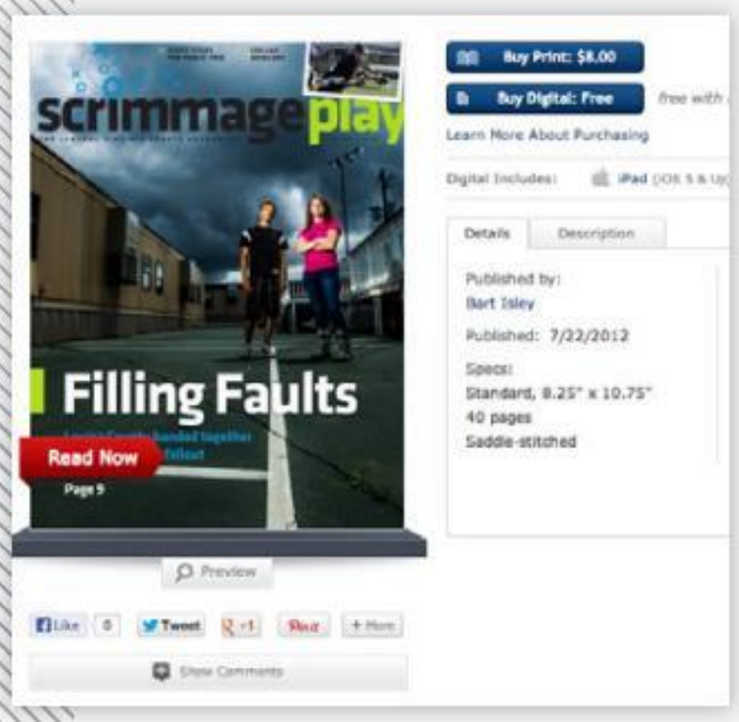

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A DAY IN THE LIFE

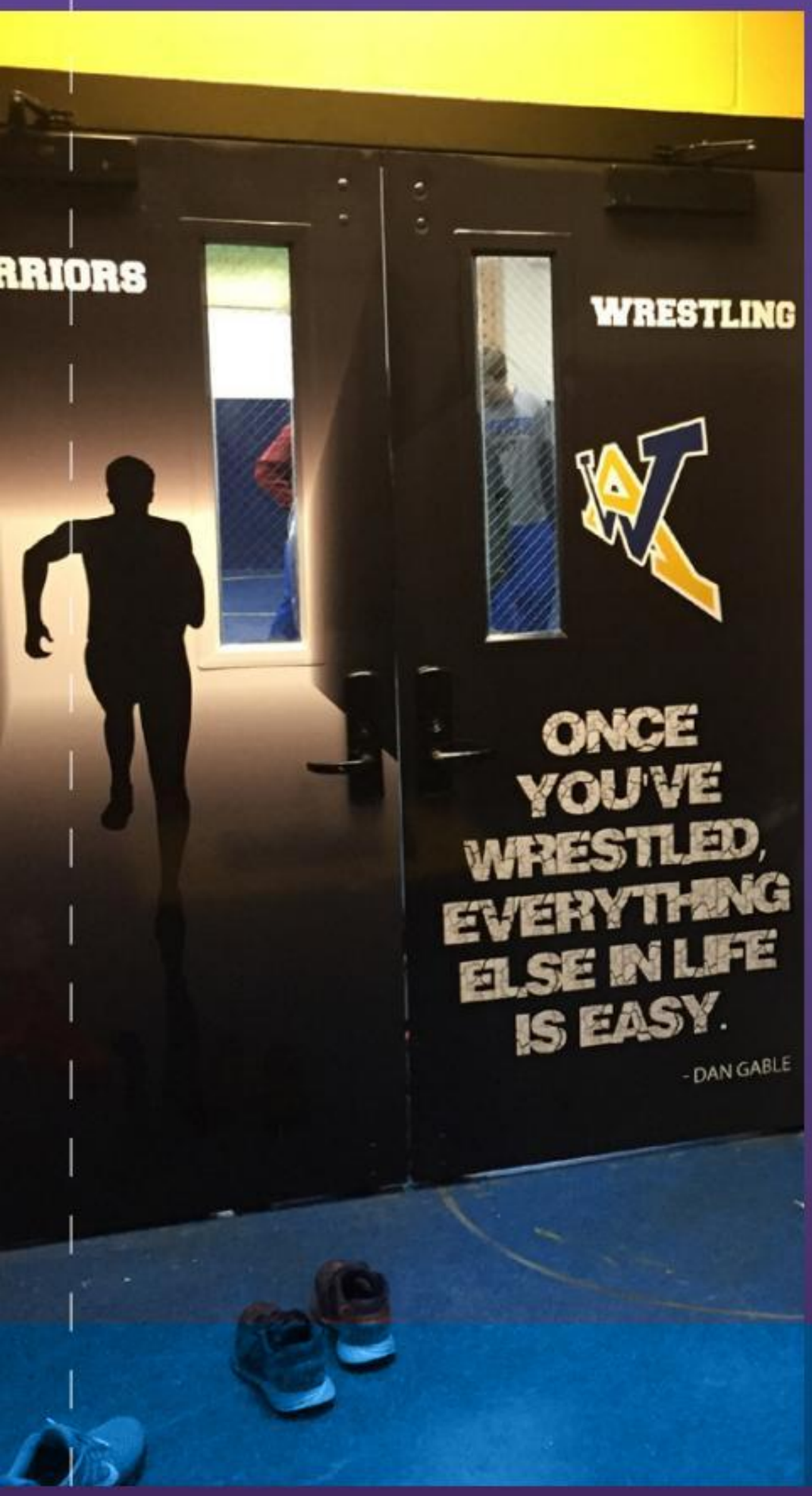
STORY AND PHOTOS BY BART ISLEY

7:03 A.M.

PAJAMA PANTS-CLAD Anthony Ramazani and his teammates make their way into Western Albemarle's wrestling room to check their weights as a cold, foggy morning slowly woke up outside. Ramazani steps onto the scale, sees he's safely within range to make weight to wrestle in the 138-pound class. He steps back off, picks up a bag that has a chicken biscuit tucked inside and steps back onto the scale, effectively weighing the biscuit to see whether or not he can eat it now, or if he has to wait until after the official weigh-in across Afton Mountain at Stuarts Draft, host of today's Cougar Classic.

The weight that flashed on the digital scale when Ramazani stepped on represented the low-point in a 13-pound swing that he endures each week. Between the sport's usual hard training and being calorie conscious, Ramazani has precise control of what goes into his body and in turn the number that appears on the scale on a Saturday before a tournament. He learned weight control from his training partner last year Russ Hill, now a freshman wrestler at the Citadel.

Shortly after the informal weight check, the Warriors load onto the bus at around 7:15 a.m. and drive to Stuarts Draft, with a huge cooler and a plastic tote packed with Cliff Bars and other snacks in tow.



"YOU DON'T STOP WHEN YOU'RE NOT WRESTLING, BECAUSE WATCHING SOMEONE ELSE'S MATCH - YOU CAN GET BETTER FROM IT." - RAMAZANI

7:45 A.M.

The Warriors' team bus pulls into the parking lot at Stuarts Draft, joining counterparts from as far away as Lebanon, Botetourt County and Appomattox in town for the Classic that is an individual tournament, not a dual-team format like half of the Warriors' weekend tournament schedule.

The Warriors pile into Draft's field house for weight check. Ramazani and not anyone else on the roster, is really concerned about there being any surprises after the informal check back in Crozet. According to Western coach Adam Mulcahy, only one scale in his tenure has weighed heavier than the Warriors' own device.

The VHSL keeps a pretty tight watch on wrestlers' weights, looking to eliminate some of the sport's more sordid past incidents. The league's optimal performance calculator includes body fat percentage and has eliminated some of the sport's more dangerous 20-25 pound cuts that relied on sauna-type situations, determining the maximum that an athlete can safely cut. There are also increasing allowances for weight gain throughout the season.

Ramazani has to be conscious of his weight if he wants to stay in the 138-pound class, but he's squared away today and comes out of the weigh-in with only one piece of bad news -- he's going to have to shave again. Wrestlers are checked for hair and nails issues to prevent any problems during the match.

But that's a minor thing. Right now it's time to eat.

8:16 A.M.

While other teams wrapped up weigh-ins and seedings are finalized, Ramazani gets to work on the process of eating and drinking after a long period of self-control interrupted by that well-evaluated chicken biscuit more than an hour ago. He starts with a green sports drink.

Like a lot of athletes, wrestlers are superstitious and for Ramazani, that includes food. He always has a chicken biscuit which is pretty normal. A less normal tradition? The Lunchables make-your-own pizza kit in his paper grocery bag of food and drinks. That pizza comes out pretty early, shortly after the official weigh-in.

After controlling his diet during the week, the first wave of food is a big change. He starts sweating immediately because his body has been retaining fluids for a long stretch and by the first match he's a little uncomfortable. By his second match, he's feeling perhaps the best he has all day as he starts to feel the energy coming on.

Over the next hour, he eats and drinks, which is convenient because the waiting has started. Wrestling tournaments definitely fit the "hurry up and wait" cliche. Ramazani won't wrestle until more than three hours after the Warriors arrived. Sure, there is warming up to do, but watching teammates helps pass the time and gives you mental reps.

"You don't stop when you're not wrestling, because watching someone else's match – you can get better from it," Ramazani said. "Kids who watch wrestling automatically have an advantage over kids who don't watch wrestling."

He does everything from helping Mulcahy demonstrate an

ACADEMIC EDGE

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WESTERN ALBEMARLE'S AVA COLES

Ava Coles splits her time between the Western Albemarle girls basketball team where she's a captain, the World Culture Club where she's the president and the Western Albemarle High jazz band.

That's a busy schedule for anyone, but it's a particularly impressive schedule for someone sporting a 4.5 GPA and a spot in the National Honor Society.

Very little has gotten lost in that mix though as Coles has found ways to contribute to the Warriors' basketball team from her freshman year on.

"Ava has been a four-year member of our varsity program and is one of those unsung glue kids that make programs like ours successful," said Western coach Kris Wright.

According to Wright, that'll also set the stage for future success.

"She's been resilient, a hard worker, and a good leader on the team," Wright said. "Those qualities combined with her sterling academic work should allow her to achieve continued success in the years ahead."

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"HAVING SOMEONE WHO WILL REALLY PUSH YOU AT THE END OF PRACTICE, IT HELPS BUILD THAT AT THE END OF A MATCH." - DAVIS

adjustment for a younger teammate to sitting in the corner when the coaching staff is split between mats. Anything to pass the time once wrestling starts.

10:23 A.M.

After the initial run of qualifying matches, teams jump onto the three mats for a quick warm-up ahead of the true first round. Ramazani drills with Will Davis, his usual training partner this year since Russ Hill's graduation. Davis is putting together a strong season of his own, and the two standouts are helping turn each other into more complete wrestlers as they continue to learn from each other's strengths. While Ramazani excels at wrestling standing up, Davis is excellent working up from the mat.

"We have very contrasting styles, we make each other better on our weakest points," Ramazani said. "His leg riding is so much better and undoubtedly that helped me out today."

A good training partner is crucial to a wrestler's development. Coaches often refer to it as building a good room, a place where wrestlers can help each other get better as drilling partners. Without another wrestler that's similar in weight that can help you work things out and ratchet up the intensity, it's exceedingly difficult to get better. Consider that Ramazani is only going to wrestle about 18 minutes in Saturday's tournament. That's not enough mat time to improve or get better. The work has to happen in practice, and there's not much a wrestler can do (besides conditioning) without a drilling partner.

"He helps push me and make me better and I push him and make him better," Davis said. "Having someone who will really push you at the end of practice it helps build that at the end of a match."

That was part of Mulcahy's vision as he built Western's program essentially from the ground up over the past few seasons. That supportive culture where wrestlers work to help each other out and develop so that they can win team accolades rather than focusing on individual success has been instrumental to the Warriors' rise. Tournaments aren't just about how you did, but it's about how many points you picked up for your squad. A pin is worth six points, a decision is worth three, so getting early pins in the first couple of rounds can make a big difference as the day wears on. He emphasizes that point in a pre-first round pep talk, and it's time to wrestle.

10:30 A.M.

Ramazani plugs his headphones into his phone and starts running through a series of rap and hip-hop tracks as he gets ready for his first match of the day. He walks slowly around the mats, alternately warming up and cheering on teammates as Western's 106-pounder Beighley Austin gets the day started with a 10-0 win, a tech fall that snags an extra point for the Warriors.

11:03 A.M.

Finally, four hours after walking into Western's wrestling room in Crozet, Ramazani takes the mat for his first match. He clearly didn't get lulled to sleep over that downtime, either and he jumps out to a 5-0 lead with a takedown and three back points. He chooses to play to his own strengths by picking

neutral to start the second period, forcing his opponent to battle him standing up.

During that first period, Mulcahy noticed Ramazani's opponent was bending at the hips looking for a sweep of some kind, making it easier for Ramazani to cradle him.

"He was just begging to be cradled, he was bent and kind of reaching," Mulcahy said. "When Anthony realized that and went for it, it was there."

But he had to employ a little bit of gamesmanship before that happened.

"I was trying to act like I was not trying to hit the cradle because the kid can hear my coach just as well as I can, so I was setting it up, trying to make it look like I was doing something else," Ramazani said.

He set it up well enough to come up with a cradle with 58 seconds left in the period that held for the pin.

After turning in his match card to the scorer's table documenting his win, by 11:24, Ramazani is back in the stands, sitting quietly, eating a sandwich and spending time on his phone. After a couple of more wins by Western Albemarle wrestlers including Nate Riley, the Warriors' standout at 182 pounds who is unbeaten on the season, It's on to the semifinals.

12:26 P.M.

After warming up again when the second round started, Ramazani takes the mat again in the semifinals of the tournament. This time it was against the tournament's top seed, who he'd faced several times before.

"I GOT THE FIRST TAKEDOWN AND IN MATCHES LIKE THAT WHERE YOU KNOW IT'S GOING TO BE CLOSE, THAT'S SO CRITICAL." - RAMAZANI

"I came in knowing it was going to be a dogfight but I got the first takedown and in matches like that where you know it's going to be close, that's so critical," Ramazani said. "So much of it's confidence."

Ramazani jumped out again in this clash with a takedown and a quick turn, but his opponent battled back with a late reversal to pull closer at 4-2. Late in the second period, Ramazani struck again, building a 7-2 lead, but again his opponent battled back, closing the gap to 9-6 in the third period. Ramazani reversed again late in the third though, pushing his lead back to 11-6.

Even facing a tough opponent, it's clear how tough of an out Ramazani has become during his career.

"Some kids have periodic pressure, Anthony wrestles hard for six

"SOME KIDS HAVE PERIODIC PRESSURE. ANTHONY WRESTLES HARD FOR SIX MINUTES." - MULCAHY

minutes," Mulcahy said. "He's chain wrestling, he's transitioning. If something is not there, he's moving on to something else."

With six minutes of hard wrestling and an 11-6 final, Ramazani advances. Now the longest wait of the day begins, the wait for the finals.

5:45 P.M.

After a few hours of watching other semifinals and consolation matches, supporting teammates and, of course, eating, the Cougar Classic's public address announcer welcomes the finalists, introducing each championship match in a tradition borrowed from the state tournament. With his headphones back on, Ramazani and his opponent from Maggie Walker are introduced at 138 pounds. Then the walking in his black and white Nike wrestling shoes begins. The way wrestlers warm up varies drastically from student athlete to student athlete. Some bounce around a lot or they're loud -- they let everyone know they're there. Some are physical, actually slapping their legs and arms until they turn red. Ramazani goes a different, more conventional route, pacing back and forth next to the mat, watching some of the action but mostly trying to get locked in. The music matters here, getting him to exactly the mindset he wants, cool and calm but deadly, ready to attack.

6:10 P.M.

More than 11 hours after he arrived at Western's campus, Ramazani takes the mat for his final. He's wrestled for about nine minutes since he weighed in in the Warriors' wrestling room, but with a tournament title on the line, all that waiting doesn't matter much.

Ramazani went to work, striking fast again by scoring a single leg takedown and immediately taking David Winters to his back for near-fall points and a 5-0 lead in the first 30 seconds.

After a Winters escape, Ramazani scores another takedown and leads 7-1 after the first period, well in control of the match. Ramazani rode out the second, staying on top and not allowing an escape for the full two minutes. Then in the third, Ramazani stayed on the attack and scored another takedown before a late Winters escape led to what became the final score. Ramazani won 9-2, securing the Cougar Classic championship.

Sure there were things to work on coming out of the match. In wrestling, critique is critical and wrestlers are often particularly hard on themselves. There's no blame to go around when it's just you on the mat. You can't hide from the results, and with that early near-fall, a pin was clearly in play.

But after receiving his medal and ascending the medal stand, tonight is about a post-tournament tradition, Mexican food at Guadalajara, where Ramazani can get the kind of volume he needs for a reasonable price. Then it's time to rest, recover and get ready for another week, another tournament, another Saturday grind. ✖

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On their senior night, the Eagles decided to share the spotlight. In an effort to raise awareness for breast cancer, the Eagles had a pink out in February, encouraging fans to wear pink. The Eagles themselves wore pink in warmups and when on the bench. While Pink Out's in October have become a staple of high school gyms, Covenant gave us a nice reminder that breast cancer is a year round issue. Great job, Eagles!

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STORY AND PHOTOS BY RYAN YEMEN

THE WORLD KEEPS SPINNING

WHEN JACK TWOMBLY came out of the locker room following Goochland's loss to Brunswick in the Conference 34 semifinals, there was a swarm of Bulldogs from students to parents to teachers waiting for him. He embraced them all, and while at first glance you'd guess they were trying to be there for him, his high school basketball career now behind him. What's more, Twombly lost his mother, Joan, to pancreatic cancer this fall. But for those standing and waiting to get a word with the Goochland senior it was the opposite of what you'd guess. Twombly was there for them, making them feel better. It was he who was composed, he who seemed to have it all together.

Just one week prior to the playoff game with Brunswick, Twombly led the way for a benefit game with Maggie Walker on senior night. It was a game where Twombly, along with the help of the Goochland coaching staff, managed to raise over $3,000 for the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network. But the effort stretched further than that. To think of his own mother's cancer wasn't enough. After all, assistant coach AJ Nash lost his mother to lung cancer in the fall of 2015.

"I'd been through the same thing last year, losing a mother so I just wanted to be there for him in any way I could," Nash said. "He said he had a senior project idea in mind. He did a great job and his teammates, friends, everyone rallied around him. All the businesses, the community they rallied around him."

So Twombly and company set up posters throughout the school about all types of cancer. They sold t-shirts of every color that represent each cancer to help raise funds. That's the kind of thinker that the Goochland senior is. His mother, even in her last weeks, knew her son was putting together the kind of thing she'd be proud of.

WHEN I'M OUT THERE, EVERYTHING JUST GOES AWAY, THINGS FEEL NORMAL AND I KNOW THAT'S CLICHE BUT IT'S SO TRUE."
– TWOMBLY

"She knew I was up to something because I was so involved in the fight," Twombly said. "She didn't know that I was doing all this research, looking not just into her cancer but all the others. And that was something I wanted to help with, raise awareness for all of them."

So the Bulldogs as a school rallied around the Twombly family. The benefit game had a sold-out crowd. Goochland won the contest 54-43 and fittingly enough, the season long double-double machine came through with just that with 22 points and 10 rebounds.

"The first play of the game, I got the tip and then an and-1 after that," Twombly said. "That's the best sports moment I'll probably ever have."

It was a fitting effort for a magical moment. But that Twombly even got to that point is arguably even more impressive when you factor in how his November led to February.

Despite the incredible loss, Twombly was a regular in practice in November, a key for the Bulldogs since so many members of its basketball roster were still playing football.

"He's been such a leader though out this entire situation, and it's one that stretches back for a year and I just can't speak highly enough about his leadership and character," said Goochland coach Preston Gordon. "He just continues too. He gives our team something extra."

When Twombly's mother died, it was a no-brainer for his team and Gordon to provide the proper support at the service.

"On the day of the funeral we said we have to be there in gameday attire for him – khaki pants, white dress shirt and red and gold ties," Gordon said. "We got permission from the superintendent on a school day to get all the players there at the courthouse where the service was."

For Twombly, being around his teammates, his classmates, his school, that's normal. And it's normal and refreshing when you don't necessarily feel that way.

"When you're alone you think about it more, you grieve more but when you're around other people it just lifts your spirits, and that's what this team has done for me," Twombly said. "I can't thank them enough for that. They've been huge."

That was the service. Getting on the court was a different source of comfort for all. First of all, without Twombly, a young Goochland team is missing a great post presence. With him, they are a program set to truly make waves. They did this year as James River District runner ups and Conference 24 semifinalists. But they're set to take a big step next year with so many returning talents. Yet with that said, without the solace and leadership that Twombly provided this season, they wouldn't have the same purpose. And this group of mostly underclassmen provided Twombly an opportunity to step out of the moment of his everyday life, a chance for him and his family to remember what life was like before this past November.

"When I'm out there, everything just goes away, things feel normal and I know that's cliche but it's so true," Twombly said. "I'm out there trying to score, grab rebounds and the crowd is getting into it and it's just better than sitting around and being sad all the time. It gets me out of that zone."

In a perfect world, Twombly and Bulldogs would have got an extra week to their season, to play in the Region 2A East

playoffs. But perhaps it was more fitting that it ended the way it did, a lesson to the youthful and promising roster that Goochland has. Because in the end, the game of the year for this team is unquestionably the benefit game, the win over Maggie Walker. It was a game that began with a moment of silence and then words from Twombly before the tip off.

"After he spoke I pulled the guys aside and told them 'hey, this isn't about basketball, this is more than the game,'" Gordon said. "We're going to come out and battle, but remember it's just a game. Tell your loved ones that you love them."

That's coming from a coach who's father is the athletic director at the school, Bryan. The elder Gordon, dealt with a prostate cancer scare last year. Pair that with his assistant in Nash's mother's passing and the Twombly family's suffering and you've got a need for somebody to step up and deliver something special. And that's what Jack Twombly managed to accomplish, of all people. The player who's suffered the most these last few months has found a way to provide his team, his program, his school with something to build on.

"Everyone came together in this time," Gordon said. "Jack's such an inspiration to all of us. He and coach Nash, they put this event together to that honored all of us. Jack, he's just got great charisma, great character. He's an outgoing personality, so you can't help but love being around him."

That teaching moment, that culmination of a young man finding a way to make something happen in light of his family's situation – that's strength, that's inspiration. And for Twombly, he came by it honestly.

"I knew when she passed I had to do something for her because she was such an inspiration to everyone," Twombly said. "If you talked to her you knew she was amazing and just an amazing person, had such a great spirit."

"IT'S JUST REMARKABLE THE WAY HE'S CARRIED HIMSELF THROUGH THIS HAVING BEEN THROUGH IT MYSELF. HE'S BEEN AN UNBELIEVABLE YOUNG MAN ABOUT ALL OF THIS." – NASH

Talk about the apple not falling far from the tree here. Ask the Bulldog faithful. Twombly leaves this program, this school in a better place than he found it. And that would make any and every mother as proud as they could be. And Nash, who's probably most suited to comment on the situation put it into perspective perfectly.

"It's just remarkable the way he's carried himself through this having been through it myself," Nash said. "He's been an unbelievable young man about all of this."

And so while Twombly and his family will never forget what Joan meant to them, they can move forward knowing that Jack is carrying the fire and passing it along. That's strength. That's resolve. And it's coming from someone you'd guess needs that from others, but is instead offering it to those around him. There's no right or wrong way to grieve, but it sure seems like Twombly has it figured out. ✖

William Monroe 62, James Monroe 59

By Bart Isley

Senior Kam'ron McCain had 11 points in the Conference 28 championship game. (Bart Isley)

William Monroe boys basketball's Anthony Terry reached the 1,000-point mark for his career before halftime, but he was far from done Thursday night in the Conference 28 title game.

On the opening play of the fourth quarter, the Dragons ran a set action for Terry on the inbounds pass. James Monroe overplayed it, leaving Terry streaking toward the basket.

The passer hit Terry in stride and he exploded for a dunk, pushing William Monroe's lead to seven. That led to a burst that gave the Dragons an 11-point lead and from there they held on to beat James Monroe 62-59 and win the Conference 28 title.

"We set up a call for him and fortunately they took the bait and I thought that really got him going and us as a team going," said William Monroe coach Brett Maynard. "I thought he finished extremely well against some really good athletes, they have a lot of height and he just elevated above them and used his body, it was great."

The victory avenged last year's conference tournament semifinal loss to the Yellow Jackets, allowing the Dragons' senior class to erase a frustrating memory that cut short their junior campaign.

"Last year they beat us by a lot, we came in determined that we were going to get the 'W' and cut down the net," Terry said. "We knew if we stayed composed, we had the lead for most of the game, we knew we'd settle down and keep on winning."

Terry finished with 21 points while fellow seniors Malique Shackelford and Kam'ron McCain had 12 and 11 respectively. Junior Jalen Anderson exploded down the stretch and scored six of his 16 points in the fourth quarter.

The Dragons had to weather James Monroe down the stretch as a few missed free throws opened the door for the Jackets to make it a game. Freshman Michael Gray had already kept James Monroe in it with four 3-pointers in the third quarter, and though he cooled off in the fourth, Khari Jefferson took over and scored seven of his 15 in the fourth. But an attempt to tie the game with a 3-pointer at the buzzer missed, setting off a wild celebration and court rush by the Monroe student section.

"We've been thinking about this one since the beginning of the year," McCain said. "I've been thinking about this since sophomore year, since junior year and now it's finally here and we won it. I'm happy."

This was just Maynard's second season as head coach, but he took over a talented group and has helped them find roles and play together as a team. McCain emerged as the playmaker – he posted 18 assists recently, tying for the second most in a single game in VHSL history – and Terry as the finisher while Shackelford provided scoring and strength underneath. Charlie Richards (who didn't play Thursday after a pregame injury) knocked down shots from outside and Anderson exploded this year as a versatile threat on both ends of the floor.

"It has taken a lot of hard work throughout this season and we've really grown together as a team," Maynard said. "I just couldn't be prouder of how they've just worked every single day."

Terry's 1,000-point career mark was particularly special for the senior as he'd set it as a goal early in his career.

"That's been my dream ever since I was a freshman on the team," Terry said. "My friend Jeff Early did it and I looked up to him all my high school career and I just wanted to be just like him."

The Dragons advance to the Region 3A East tournament next week where they'll be battling it out for a state tournament berth. ✖

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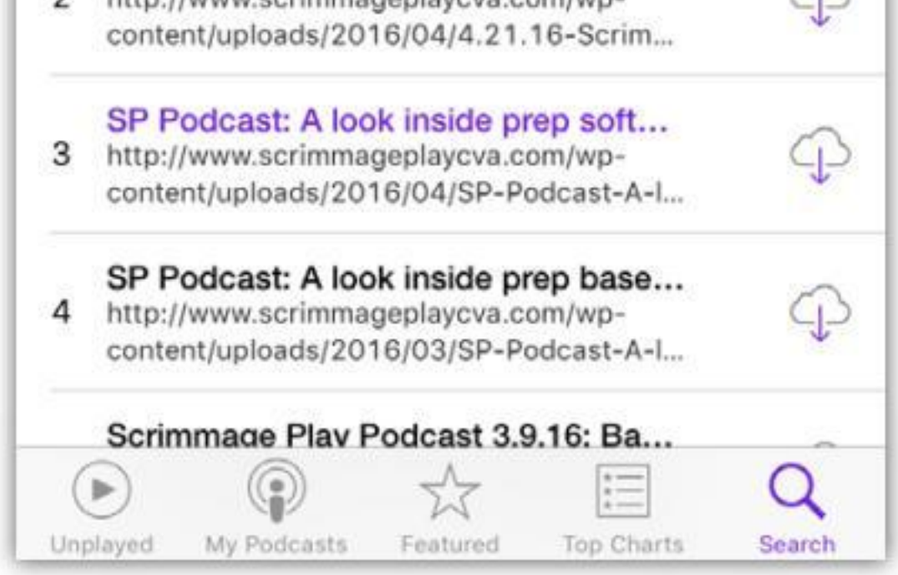

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A wider field

More competition in the NCAA would be a good thing

Much has been made about the UConn women's basketball team the last two weeks, its legacy, Geno Auiremma's place in college hoops history and so on. An awful lot of opinions have come from media members that don't watch a lot of women's basketball. As such, I have a hard time caring about what the talking heads of the national media think about a sport that they pay so little attention to. But one topic that did pique my interest after the Huskies crossed the 100 straight win mark was the question of whether or not UConn's dominance, particularly recently with Tennessee no longer being the other traditional dominant force, was good or bad for the sport. Every sport needs a dominant team for fans to rally around, and others to hate on, an especially in basketball. What's the sport without the Lakers, without Duke? But you also need parity, right? Is the occasional but mostly rare Notre Dame or Maryland national title sprinkled in between UConn national titles good enough going forward?

Shooting from the hip, probably not. Not if we're talking about promoting and building the collegiate women's basketball product. And in Central Virginia, we're lucky enough to have an example why.

Before we launched Scrimmage Play in 2009, the Charlottesville girls basketball team had never lost a Jefferson District tournament. Now for newer fans or readers, back then, winning secured a Region II bid, so it mattered. The Black Knights weren't just the team to beat, they were the only JD squad that had a shot of getting out of Region II and making it to the state platform, the Group AA tournament in their case. To give you an idea, in the '08-'09 season, it was a massive deal that William Monroe (then a member of the JD) split with Charlottesville in the regular season. The Black Knights rarely ever dropped a district clash.

So in 2009 when Fluvanna County saw the tandem of Lloyd sisters in K-anna, a senior, and Mia, a sophomore, took a huge step forward and become the dominant team while Charlottesville underwent a substantial rebuild, well the district changed. Add to it, at Western Albemarle, Bridget Shaffrey and Kelsey Swanson were coming into their own as well and suddenly you have a different field. In the '09-'10 season it was Fluvanna and Western battling for the regular season and tournament titles. In '10-'11 it was Western, Charlottesville and Monticello. In '11-'12 it was Monticello, Powhatan and Charlottesville. In the '14-15 season we saw Orange County become a player at the table. This year, Louisa County won its first ever JD tournament. In just eight years, the Jefferson District has diversified so much that nothing is given. It's not just one or two teams battling, it's all of them and this season might have been the most impressive overall product.

Looking at the way the JD field has played as they've branched off into their conferences, there's no questioning that the parity, the relatively even field of teams has helped this group going forward. With Charlottesville and Louisa winning their respective Conference 23 and Conference 19 tournaments and Albemarle picking up a Region 5A North berth and a Region 3A West bid coming down to a Western Albemarle/Fluvanna Conference 29 showdown, you've got half the district moving on into the second week of playoffs. That wasn't a possibility before conference realignment four years ago, but the JD has taken full advantage of a basketball-rich community and instead of all the talent coagulating to one or two squads, the wealth has found a way to distribute itself amongst every member. The teams that didn't advance through to region play this year have in the recent past and are just building themselves back up.

> "When women's college basketball gets to that point it will be because the high school product has become so rich."

So if anyone was to ask me whether high school girls basketball is better off now than it was say 10-15 years ago? The answer is absolutely, unequivocally.

To bring it back around, you have to pat UConn on the back for its accomplishments. But I know those gaudy type of streaks will mean a lot more when they're harder to come by. I know that a UConn national title will mean a lot more when it's not a foregone conclusion. And when women's college basketball gets to that point it will be because the high school product has become so rich with talent that there is enough to go around to more than just a half dozen schools. The sport will get there and it will make it all the better, but we're not there quite yet. ✖

Ryan Yemen,
CREATIVE EDITOR

back talk »

What do you think about the state of women's basketball?
ryan@scrimmageplay.com

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Alumni Profile: Dale Solomon

It has often been said that sports can show you the world. For Fork Union alum Dale Solomon that turned out to be quite literal.

Solomon, who graduated from Fork Union in 1978 after leading the postgraduate squad to a 19-1 record, went on to Virginia Tech where he was an All-Metro Conference selection from 1979 to 1982. From there, he played professionally for 12 seasons in Italy and Spain, becoming one of the most recognizable players in Italian professional basketball.

This summer when he was inducted into the Fork Union Military Academy Sports Hall of Fame, he responded to a question at one of the induction events in a bit of flawless Italian, showing just how much of an impact that stint overseas had on the legend.

Solomon still holds the record for most points in a season by a freshman at Virginia Tech as well as top 10 all-time spots in points, points per game, field-goal makes, field-goal percentage, free-throw makes and rebounds for the Hokies. In 1979 he was the Metro Conference Tournament MVP.

"Fork Union paved the way for me just like it has for so many others," Solomon said at his FUMA sports hall of fame induction.

It paved the way for him all the way to Italy and back.

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